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NEWS RELEASE

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SOCIAL SECURITY EMPLOYEE INDICTED IN FALSE DOCUMENT CASE

WICHITA, Kan. – A Social Security Administration employee in the agency's Dodge City, Kan., field office has been indicted for manipulating Social Security records to assist two illegal aliens who are related to her, United States Attorney Eric Melgren announced today.

The employee, Estela Valverde, 31, has worked in the Dodge City field office since 1998. In an indictment filed Wednesday in U.S. District Court in Wichita, Valverde was charged in six counts arising out of allegedly manipulating Social Security records in January 2002 for her sister-in-law, Beatriz Estrella, 30, Dodge City, and Beatriz Estrella's sister, Selene Estrella, 29, also of Dodge City. Both Beatriz Estrella and Selene Estrella are employed in Dodge City by Unified School District 443.

The indictment alleges that Beatriz Estrella and Selene Estrella are illegal aliens who used counterfeit Texas birth certificates to obtain United States passports, and then presented those passports to Valverde at the Dodge City Social Security office so their records would indicate they are United States citizens and so that new, unrestricted Social

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Security cards would be issued to them.

All three women were arrested Wednesday by agents of the Social Security Administration Inspector General's office and Immigration and Customs Enforcement. They are scheduled to appear on the indictment at 1:30 p.m. Friday before United States Magistrate Judge Karen M. Humphreys in Wichita.

"The United States will protect the accuracy and sanctity of Social Security and citizenship information," Melgren said Wednesday. "Government employees who attempt to contaminate that information will be dealt with swiftly and severely."

The indictment also alleges that Valverde made false statements to Social Security Administration investigators, aided and abetted the unlawful use of a United States passport, and made false entries into official government records, a federal felony that carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. The unlawful use of a passport charge also has a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison, and the false statement charge carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

Beatriz Estrella and Selene Estrella both are charged with making a false passport application (10-year maximum sentence); unlawful use of passport (also a 10-year maximum sentence); possession of a fraudulently obtained passport to defraud the United States (15-year maximum sentence); and 2 counts each of making a false claim of U.S. citizenship (3-years maximum prison sentence).

The case was investigated by the Inspector General's office of the Social Security Administration and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Brent Anderson. As in any criminal case, an indictment merely alleges criminal conduct and the persons charged are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.